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DAN SMOOT

TALKING OUR BOYS TO DEATH

On February 7, 1965, President Johnson ordered limited bombing of selected targets in North Vietnam, but rendered the bombing ineffective by announcing that we would not bomb major cities, harbors, and vital industrial installations. He even kept vital *military* installations (such as airfields and missile bases) off limits to American bombers.

Communist propaganda (repeated and amplified in the United States by such leading "doves" as Senator J. William Fulbright) condemned America for indiscriminately murdering millions of women and children in North Vietnam — though, in truth (as President Johnson himself has acknowledged), the communists kill more civilians in South Vietnam *daily* than our bombing ever killed *annually* in North Vietnam.[1]

On April 7, 1965, President Johnson offered the North Vietnamese government a billion-dollar bribe to stop fighting.[2] Ho Chi Minh ignored the offer.

Beginning May 13, 1965, the United States halted bombing in North Vietnam for 5 days. Beginning December 24, 1965, the U.S. halted bombing 37 days. Both halts were intended to get Ho Chi Minh to negotiate.[3] He used the bombing pauses to resupply and reinforce his troops in South Vietnam and to launch new attacks.

In another effort to induce Ho Chi Minh to negotiate, Johnson, early in 1968, ordered U.S. planes to stay away from the Hanoi-Haiphong area.[3] The communists used this respite to complete preparations for their Tet offensive. When that offensive ended, communists were threatening all major cities in South Vietnam; they controlled more of the countryside than we did; and their military manpower was growing by leaps and bounds.[4] By Johnson's orders, all of North Vietnam was still a sanctuary against attack by American ground forces.

The limited bombing which Johnson permitted in North Vietnam (though not enough to inflict

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damage that could have won the war quickly) did slow down the flow of communist men and supplies to the front.

On February 2, 1968, Johnson said "we would be endangering the lives of our men" to halt or suspend the limited bombing in Vietnam until the enemy was willing to take reciprocal action and talk peace in good faith.[5] The President repeated those sentiments in a speech on March 16, 1968.[6] Then, on March 31, he unilaterally halted bombing (of 78% of North Vietnamese territory, containing 90% of the population), and begged the communists to join him in negotiations for peace.

For more than a month, the communists rejected every American suggestion of a place to meet. They suggested cities in communist countries, knowing we would refuse, then ridiculed Johnson for having stated many times that he would "go anywhere, any time" to talk peace with them.

While our troop levels were frozen (at about 550,000 men) and North Vietnam was protected from American attack by President Johnson's orders, the communists poured more men and weapons into South Vietnam, intensifying their attacks against cities and civilians, and against U. S. and allied military forces.

At one a.m. on May 3, 1968, President Johnson was notified that communists had selected Paris as the place "to decide with the U.S. the unconditional cessation by the United States of its bombing and all other acts of war . . . and later to talk about other matters related to the two sides."[7] Though admitting that he was "quite concerned"[7] about the communist escalation of the war since his de-escalation order of March 31, the President immediately accepted the communist proposal of Paris as the place to talk — on their terms.

Having been solicited by the American President to talk, having picked the place, and having stipulated that they would deal only with concessions to be made by the United States, the communists went to Paris like conquerors, demanding surrender.

The talks at Paris began on May 10; and "all hell broke loose" in Vietnam, as one American officer put it.[8] Communists began daily rocket attacks on South Vietnamese cities, killing and wounding hundreds of civilians; and American battle casualties more than doubled anything we had suffered before.

Before the peace talks began, American battle deaths were averaging 184 a week. Immediately after they began, our battle deaths were 562 a week.[9]

On May 28, 1968, President Johnson admitted that our "casualties have been very heavy, particularly since the Paris talks began and the stepped-up attacks that they [the communists] have made." He said that since March 31, 1968, we have kept our bombers away from "about 90 per cent of the [North] Vietnamese population," although, during that period, the Hanoi government has been pouring men and supplies into South Vietnam "at an unprecedented rate." He criticized North Vietnam for refusing "to enter into serious, quiet discussions" of ways to end the fighting and for using the Paris talks to spread "wide-ranging propaganda." But he made it obvious that he plans to do nothing about this dreadful situation. Johnson said:

"While our men deal with the communist forces in the field, we shall continue patiently to see whether the Paris talks yield anything in the way of constructive results."[10]

By the end of May, 1968, total American battle casualties (killed *and* wounded) averaged, for the year to date, 2692 a week — as compared with an average of 1372 a week for the first 5 months of 1967.

By June 8, 1968, American battle casualties in Vietnam (since January 1, 1961) totaled 177,716 — 24,744 killed; 152,972 wounded.[9]

If communists continue killing and wounding Americans at the average weekly rate which has prevailed since the beginning of this year, total American battle casualties in Vietnam (since the first of January, 1961) will reach 255,784 by the end of 1968 — 35,730 killed; 220,054 wounded.

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The government has released no statistics on non-combat war casualties — Americans who have been killed or crippled by disease and accidents.

By the first of June, 1968, American military officials in Vietnam were giving these details on how the suspension of American bombing had helped the communists:

— The port of Haiphong was no longer glutted with supplies stacked on wharves and streets because American bombing had demolished bridges and highways. Ships from communist countries — as well as ships from nations which are supposed to be American allies — were unloading cargoes quickly at Haiphong. Roads and bridges had been repaired; new docking facilities had been built; a huge Soviet dredge was working openly and safely to keep the port cleared of silting; railroads ran right up to the dock for direct loading from ships.

— Railroad tracks, bridges, and roads above the 20th parallel, immune from American bombing, had been repaired since March 31; and they were constantly jammed with rolling stock from communist China, taking supplies to Hanoi and Haiphong.

— With rail and water transportation restored as a result of the stopping of American bombing, the communists had deployed some 5000 trucks to the southern panhandle of North Vietnam, thus, in effect, moving the main center of their supply network closer to the infiltration routes into South Vietnam.

— Surface-to-air-missile battalions had been shifted to the southern panhandle; the number of 37-millimeter anti-aircraft guns in that area had been doubled; 100-millimeter anti-aircraft guns were operating, for the first time, near the Demilitarized Zone.[11]

By the middle of June, a huge airbase just above the 19th parallel (immune from American attacks) had been restored and enlarged as an operational base and refueling stop for all types of Soviet-made military aircraft — from helicopters to MIG fighters.[12]

Now, the enemy is as well armed as Americans are; and battle casualties continue to rise.[8]

Here are excerpts from a report cabled from Saigon by correspondent Bonner Day, published in the June 24, 1968, issue of *U.S. News & World Report*:

"After years of sacrifice and determination here in Vietnam, the mood of many Americans — civilians and military — has changed almost overnight . . . . The feeling of working for a goal seems to be gone . . . .

"Talk to the lower echelons — officers and enlisted men, career employees and civilians on temporary contracts . . . . At this level, the U. S. effort in Vietnam is talked about openly and frankly as a lost cause . . . . Americans seem to have succumbed to the apathy that, in the minds of many, has long typified the South Vietnamese soldier and Government officials.

"There are two main reasons:

"(1) Americans in Vietnam, in growing numbers, feel that the U.S. public and the Johnson administration have exhausted their patience with the war and are now working for a face-saving way out at truce talks in Paris.

"(2) Officers and enlisted men in the field do not like the ground rules of the war. They never have. Now, those ground rules seem more frustrating than before . . . .

"These men, sent here to put their lives on the line for a goal that seems no longer to exist, don't like the bombing restrictions over North Vietnam. They don't like to see the communists operating from sanctuaries. They don't like to see enemy supplies pouring in through Cambodia. They don't like an arbitrary ceiling of 550,000 American combat troops, which they regard as evidence of Washington's lack of determination to try to win the war . . . .

"More and more officers in the field are saying that either present political restraints must be dropped, and the enemy so badly hurt that he will quit, or the U.S. should throw in the towel and get out of the country."

More than 3 years ago, when Johnson ordered limited bombing of North Vietnam, conservative opposition to his disastrous great society programs collapsed, because millions of conservatives rejoiced that "at last, we have a President who is standing up to the communists." At that time, I predicted:

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Johnson would keep the limited war going until we had lost hundreds of thousands of men. Our economy would be strained to the point of utter bankruptcy. Communist-liberal propaganda, at home and abroad, would picture us as a barbaric nation because of our "ruthless" slaughter of North Vietnamese civilians, though, in fact, our limited bombing would cause little loss of life in the North, while communists killed thousands of civilians in the South. We would be totally discredited for our "inability" to win a war against a small communist state. Then, Johnson would give the communists what they want: he would force a coalition government upon South Vietnam, which would mean a surrender of the nation to communists, just as it did in China in the late 1940's and in Laos in 1962. The communists would murder thousands of anti-communists in South Vietnam, just as they did in North Korea when they were given control of that area at the close of World War II; just as they did in China in the late 1940's and early 1950's; just as they did in North Vietnam when given that area in 1954; just as they did in Laos in the early 1960's. While the communist purge in South Vietnam was going on, our government would be giving the communists billions of dollars to "rehabilitate Southeast Asia," while drenching the American people with propaganda about how our "firmness and restraint" had brought peace and stability to Asia.[13]

A great deal of what I predicted in 1965 has already happened; the remainder is in the offing.

We can forestall the completion of this tragedy only if we elect a President and a Congress who will:

— declare war on North Vietnam, and then use every ounce of our national strength to win a military victory;

— as soon as the Ho Chi Minh government falls or surrenders, proclaim all of Vietnam a unified nation under the jurisdiction of the anti-communist government of South Vietnam;

— give to the government of Chiang Kai-shek on Formosa, to the anti-communist government of South Korea, and to the anti-communist government of South Vietnam all weapons and supplies which we have in that part of the world and which we do not need to bring home for the defense of our own land;

— tell those three anti-communist governments that they are on their own to defend themselves against communism in whatever way they please;

— renounce the SEATO Treaty of 1955, since other nations have violated it by ignoring their obligations under it;

— then pull all American military forces out of Asia and let Asians fight their own wars with their own men in their own way.

SUGGESTION: Study carefully and distribute widely our "Record of the 90th Congress" which details the voting records of all members of the present Congress. Price: $1.00.

FOOTNOTES

(1) *U.S. News & World Report*, May 20, 1968, p. 33

(2) *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1965, p. 451

(3) UPI dispatch from Saigon, Apr. 1, 1968

(4) *U.S. News & World Report*, Mar. 25, 1968, p. 36

(5) AP dispatch from New York, Mar. 24, 1968

(6) *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, Mar. 22, 1968, p. 630

(7) *U.S. News & World Report*, May 13, 1968, p. 16

(8) *U.S. News & World Report*, June 24, 1968, p. 30

(9) *Dallas Times Herald*, June 14, 1968, p. 4 A

(10) *Dallas Morning News*, May 29, 1968, p. 1

(11) *U.S. News & World Report*, June 10, 1968, p. 52

(12) *Dallas Morning News*, June 24, 1968, p. 30

(13) For a brief summary of our Asian involvements and surrenders which have led to the present tragedy in Vietnam, see "President Johnson's Two Wars," *The Dan Smoot Report*, June 21, 1965, pp. 195 ff. Price 25¢ each, 6 copies for $1.00.

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